

orfeo

N°15

MAGAZINE

The guitar in Japan

Masaki Sakurai
Kojiro Nejime
Kaoru Ono
Masahiro Tanabe

Aura Guitar Shop

Daisuke Kuriyama
Marín Nejime
Yuichi Shimizu

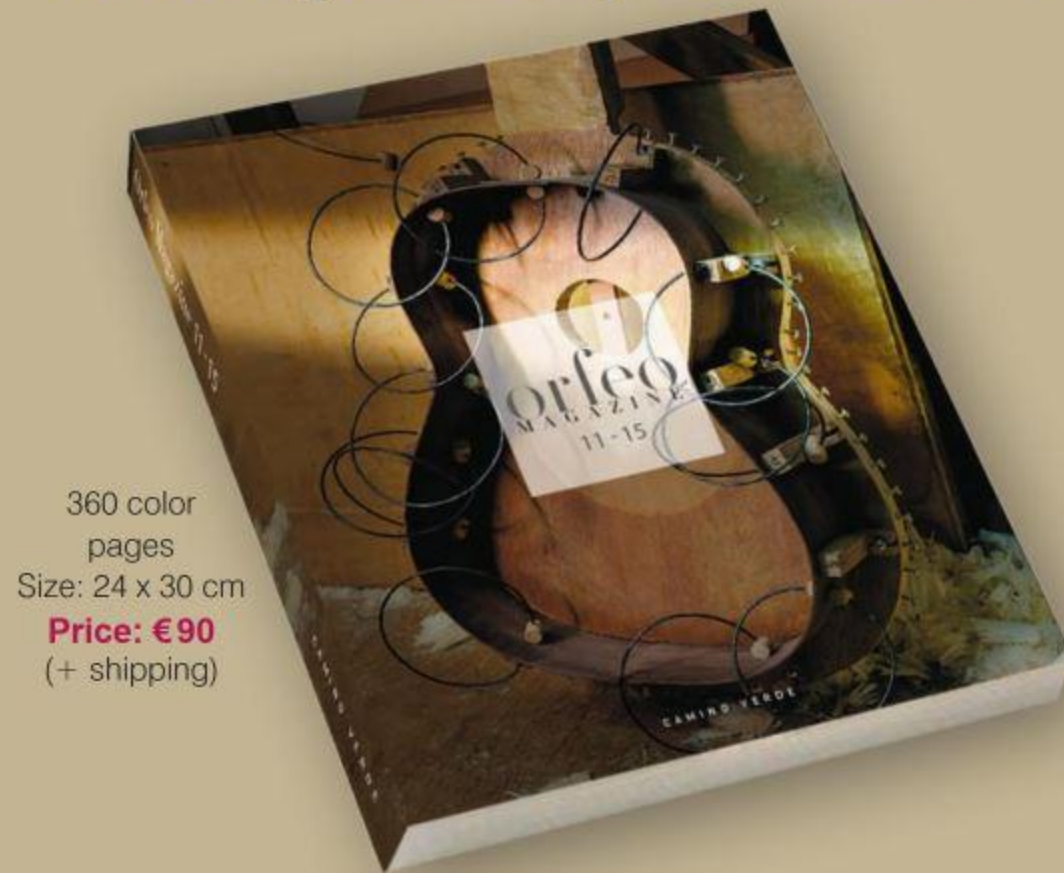
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From the Editor

orfeo

MAGAZINE

N°15

If you want to understand Japan, you must first understand its syncretic nature. This country has always had a flair for blending cultural specificities from afar and turning them into something new. Since time immemorable it has demonstrated this through its religious beliefs (combining Buddhism and Shintoism), art, language and industry. Ever has it evolved on the basis of imported elements, which are assimilated, then transformed.

What may, at first glance, appear to be copies are actually something quite apart: they always entail commingling and appropriation. And Japan's guitar making tradition is no exception.

In this edition, you will meet the great luthiers of Japan's past, who took their inspiration from Spanish, French or German guitars, while incorporating their own techniques, materials and details. We also visit the workshops of those perpetuating the practice of artisanal lutherie, in the shadow of industrial manufacturers.

The luthiers featured here are not the only ones who deserve a visit. We beg the forgiveness of Yuichi Imai, Teruji Yamano and their peers, and hope to return soon...

Alberto Martinez



The start of the
cherry blossom
season in Ueno
Park, Tokyo.

Japan is the only country in Asia to have taken an early interest in the guitar, as is evidenced by the large number of guitarists, luthiers, composers and manufacturers coming onto the scene throughout the twentieth century.

The classical guitar in Japan

Japan and Europe first came into regular contact in the sixteenth century, when Jesuit missionaries and Portuguese merchants arrived in Japan from the Macao trading post. In Jesuit schools, students could learn music and Western instruments, primarily the organ, trumpet, harp and lute.

But when the Tokugawa shoguns came to power in the country in 1615, they expelled foreigners, banned imported products and shut Japan away from the outside world (Edo period, 1603 to 1868). It was not until the Meiji Era (1868 to 1912) that the feudal regime of the shogunate came to an end, her-

alding the restoration of the Japanese Empire and the opening up of the country to the rest of the world. In 1879 the Meiji government took an unprecedented decision: the teaching of Western music at primary and secondary schools was to become compulsory.

The first guitars

The first Japanese musician said to own a classical guitar was Kenpachi Hiruma, a guitarist and mandolinist trained in Germany and Italy who, upon his return to Japan, became a guitar teacher and composer. In 1906, he also founded the first

mandolin ensemble, and such orchestras are still popular today.

In the early twentieth century, other guitars made their way to Japan thanks to the prolific composer and guitarist, Morishige Takei (a student under Hiruma), who played on Romantic guitars made by Lacote, Panormo and Stauffer, purchased through Philip Bone in London. These Romantic guitars greatly influenced Japanese guitar makers in the first half of the twentieth century. It is important to bear in mind that Japanese luthiers were trained, first and foremost, in violin lutherie. Aesthetically, the guitars that they produced came to resemble Spanish guitars, but their construction remained faithful to that of quartet instruments and most Romantic guitars (body and neck fitted together last).

Once again, it was Andrés Segovia who gave the classical guitar a tremendous boost here. In 1929 his concerts in Osaka, Tokyo and Kobe left an indelible impression on his audiences and on Japanese luthiers. From the 1960s Japan underwent a period of unprecedented economic development. As people had more change in their pockets, they turned their attention to leisure activities and the discovery of other cultures. Demand for guitars grew exponentially; there were more than ten million people taking guitar lessons in Japan.

Many instrument makers shifted gear to enable in-

dustrial-scale production, employing dozens of luthiers and churning out thousands of guitars each month (such as Yamaha, Ibanez and Aria).

The Spanish touch

Several Spanish luthiers had a profound influence on Japanese lutherie. The first to visit Japan was Eduardo Ferrer (Granada), invited by Yamaha in 1966 to help its luthiers develop their instruments. Next came Hernández and Aguado (Madrid), who were also called over by Yamaha so as to improve its classical guitars. They were followed by Arcán-

CLIMATE

The Japanese archipelago curves its way from north-east to south-west over a stretch of two thousand, two hundred kilometres. Its climate is temperate overall, but displays huge disparities across the country's various regions. Along the Pacific coast, for example, between Tokyo and Osaka, the average summer temperature often exceeds 30°C, with high rainfall and humidity levels of around 80%. Winter, on the other hand, is generally dry and sunny. Such hygrometrical variations are a problem for the stability of woods and pose a major challenge for lutherie.

STRINGS

One of the factors considerably hampering the development of the classical guitar in Japan until the fifties was gut strings. For a start, they were costly and did not cope well with the humidity. Moreover, guitars strung with catgut offered less volume, and were thus hard to incorporate into the mandolin orchestras that were so in vogue at the time. This explains why there are so many pre-war classical guitars built and strung with steel strings.

WOODS

Japan did not traditionally have access to exotic woods (such as rosewood, ebony, or mahogany) from America or Africa. Luthiers would work with local varieties. With their violin making background, they would use maple for the back and sides, keyaki (zelkova serrata, Japanese elm) and certain fruit tree woods (including pear and cherry). But such was the frustration at not having rosewood like their European counterparts, that they would sometimes tint light-coloured woods with dark varnishes to achieve a similar look. In the 1930s and 1940s, Japanese luthiers faced the same restrictions as those encountered by luthiers today under CITES regulations.

gel Fernández, after having hosted Masaru Kohno in his Madrid workshop. To illustrate the history of the classical guitar in Japan, we have chosen four luthiers who typify its development: Masakichi Suzuki, Kinpachi Miyamoto, Sakazo Nakade and Masaru Kohno.

Ed. – We are very grateful to Hervé César, guitar teacher and collector in Paris, who taught us a great deal about the history of the guitar in Japan and shared antique instruments with us, along with his friend, Philippe Herscu.

Masakichi Suzuki (1859-1944)

Suzuki was Japan's first luthier to focus exclusively on building string quartet instruments, "shamisens" (traditional Japanese plucked string instruments) and to make the first concert guitars. He founded the Suzuki Violin Co. in Nagoya in 1887, won several medals in international exhi-

bitions and earned an outstanding reputation for the quality of his violins.

He started making guitars toward the end of the century, and from 1930 produced the "Lacote" model, inspired by the work of the great French luthier and in particular by the guitar that Morishige Takei brought back to Japan.



The woods are the same as those used for violins: spruce for the soundboard and maple for the body.



In the early twentieth century, Japanese luthiers were greatly influenced by Romantic guitars. This is a Lacote model crafted by Masakichi Suzuki in the 1930s.

Kinpachi Miyamoto (1878-1960)



Miyamoto took his inspiration from Segovia's Manuel Ramírez guitar.



Very few guitars were crafted by Miyamoto.

Kinpachi Miyamoto, trained at a very early age as a luthier of string quartet instruments, was able to examine and measure Segovia's famous Manuel Ramírez guitar when Segovia toured Japan in 1929. He went on to craft a few guitars, some inspired by arpeggiones and highly sought-after today, and others more closely resembling

Spanish guitars. Renowned for the excellence of his violins, he is often touted as the "Stradivari of Asia" and his clients included Fritz Kreisler, Ginette Neveu and Albert Einstein. He was the first to nudge the Romantic guitar in the direction of the Spanish guitar.



High-strength bracing, probably made with steel strings in mind.

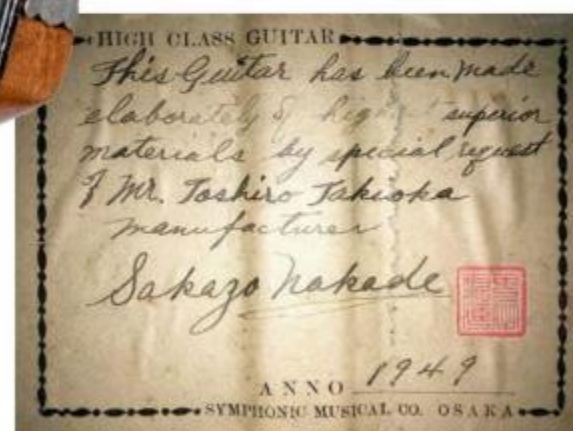
Sakazo Nakade (1906-1993)

With his brother, Rokutaro, Sakazo Nakade learned lutherie under Kinpachi Miyamoto in the 1930s. They were the first luthiers to travel to Spain to study guitar construction and visit the workshops of José Ramírez and Hernández y Aguado.

As his work epitomises the Japanese classical guitar (Spanish styling and Japanese construction), Sakazo Nakade is considered the "the father of modern Japanese lutherie".

Upon Sakazo Nakade's death, his sons who took over the studio.

The body is made of "keyaki" (*zelkova serrata*), or Japanese elm.



Several generations of the Nakade family have worked in lutherie.





Masaru Kohno (1926-1998)



Guitar dating from the same year as the Competition in Liège (1967).

Kohno is the Japanese luthier who is certainly the most widely-known in the West. A qualified cabinetmaker – and self-taught guitar maker – he built his first guitars in 1948 by studying those of Sakazo Nakade, without ever meeting him in person or visiting his workshop.

In 1960, he headed to Spain, where he visited Fleta's studio in Barcelona and, more assiduously, that of Arcángel Fernández in Madrid. In 1967, he won the Gold Medal at the International Guitar Building Competition in Liège (Belgium) and from there his renown was catapulted around the world. Back in Tokyo, he founded the magazine Gendai Guitar, aiming to promote the guitar among the wider Japanese public. As a perfectionist, ceaselessly striving for his ideal, he developed different bracing systems over the course of his career, while nonetheless staunchly adhering to spruce for his soundboards and Japanese-style construction. His nephew, Masaki Sakurai, who joined the studio in 1967, has perpetuated the work of the Kohno brand since he took over the workshop in 1998.

The head recalls Masaru Kohno's admiration for Ignacio Fleta.



Different bracing styles tested by Kohno throughout his career (top left 1950, right 1952, lower left 1967, right 1991).





The district of Shinjuku in Tokyo, with its throngs of people and brightly lit signs.

櫻井正毅

Masaki Sakurai

Masaki Sakurai began working with his uncle Masaru Kohno and, upon his passing, took over as head of the family business. Today, Kohno Guitar Manufacturing has nine employees and turns out 300 guitars per year.



The different stages of manufacture are divided up among the workshop's nine employees.

“My most important innovation has been to add little pieces of wood to certain key spots in the soundboard’s bracing.”

What changes have there been in the workshop since you have been at the helm?

Masaki Sakurai – The most significant change has been the bracing. My uncle, Masaru Kohno, took his cue from Fleta when it came to construction. I have since made several developments: the bracing is different; the soundboards are stiffer, measuring between 2.4 and 2.5 mm in thickness; and I have added a raised fingerboard on certain models.

My most important innovation has been to add little pieces of wood to certain key spots in the soundboard’s bracing, in abnormally mobile areas which would otherwise stifle the sound.

But the wood is never the same...

M. S. – The wood no, but the bracing yes: I have measured the soundboard’s vibrations and these floppy spots always occur in the same place, with regard to this particular bracing system, obviously. I studied the guitar’s vibratory mode with an acoustician from the University of Tokyo. We identified the areas on the soundboard where sound was being smothered by a conflict, and by adding small masses to these spots, I can improve the overall volume of the guitar, the G-string and the first string.

The bracing that Masaki Sakurai developed, with small segments of added mass to control the soundboard’s mobility.





The raised fingerboard on the Maestro RF model.



The Maestro RF, top of the Masaki Sakurai range.

“For the Japanese market, our tops are almost exclusively spruce.”

In 1988, I won the first prize in a lutherie competition organised by UNESCO in Paris and in 2017, I received a major award in Japan for my research in this field.

Which wood to you use for the tops?

M. S. – For the international market, we use both spruce and red cedar. But for the local market, our tops are almost exclusively spruce. Japanese guitarists have such a penchant for spruce that even Ramírez makes a model these days especially for the Japanese market.

In Japan the sound that everyone is looking for is that which stems from spruce. This harks back to gagaku, a genre of traditional Japanese music, which is in D minor. Spruce is better suited to this key, which is why I find it more appealing.

But in Japan you have ezomatsu (Yezo spruce, *picea jezoensis*), which is very similar to European spruce.

M. S. – Yes, but the regions where Japan’s ezomatsu forests grow are not cold enough; the wood is softer and the growth rings too widely spaced. I like rigid, tightly-grained spruce, which comes from the Swiss Alps.

And which woods for the rest of the guitar?

M. S. – Rosewood above all, be it from India, Madagascar or Brazil. I have no supply problems under CITES for Brazilian rosewood. Actually, I am currently expecting a shipment of



Spruce and red cedar tops waiting their turn.



The impressive diversity of Japanese saws.



Sizeable stock of wood.



An old machine for shaping ribs that had belonged to his uncle, Masaru Kohno.

about one hundred sets. Obviously, I keep it for the best models. I love the sound of jacaranda! Occasionally we use maple for the back and ribs, but never cypress.

**How do you build your guitars?
Do you do it the Spanish way?**

M. S. – No, I do it my way! First the body and then the neck, but the assembly itself is a little different. You need to bear in mind that Japanese luthiers are trained in violin lutherie, like Kimpachi Miyamoto, and we are famous for our skills in joinery.

How many models do you make?

M. S. – Our models come in two lines. Under the Sakurai Kohno label, we offer the models Maestro, Special and Professional-J (J for Jacaranda). Under the Masaki Sakurai label, our models are: the Maestro RF (Raised Fingerboard); PC (Paris Competition), a replica of the competition guitar; Special; Concert-J and Concert-R (for Rosewood).



Why so many models?

M. S. – Not all of the tonewood that we order turns out to be of the same quality. Our construction and bracing do not vary much, but we make our models in accordance with the quality of the woods we receive and the need to offer a range of prices.

Which varnish do you use?

M. S. – Cashew finish (*Anacardium occidentale*), from the very outset. If we were to rank varnishes from the hardest to softest, it would be as follows: polyurethane (like Ramirez), nitro-cellulose (like Hauser), French polishing and cashew nut.

Cashew varnish is lighter than the others, can be applied with a sprayer, and its prized for the protection that it offers against insects. Personally, I think that it is superior to French polish. Cashew finishing is traditional in Japan. The only real drawback is how thin a liquid it is: this makes it difficult to apply with a spray-gun without it dribbling into runs.



The Sakurai PC model is a reproduction of the 1988 Paris Competition guitar.

補
寝
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Kojiro Nejime

Kojiro “Alberto” Nejime has worked with Antonio Marín in Granada, won several prizes in international competitions, taught lutherie in Japan and written a meticulously detailed book about the construction of classical guitars.





An Antonio Marín template from 1984.

How did you find your vocation as a luthier?

Kojiro Nejime – My brother was a guitarist and in the seventies he set off to study in the Royal Conservatory of Music in Madrid. I loved listening to him play and it was his music that sparked my desire to build guitars. I learned the basics by observing a luthier in Tokyo who had apprenticed under Kohno, but very quickly I realised that if I wanted to make further progress, I would need to go to Spain.

In 1979, I set off for Granada and for one year, I spent time in Antonio Marín's workshop. Antonio's generosity and open-mindedness helped me tremendously.

We became lifelong friends and I have been back to visit him several times.

Which other luthiers have influenced you?

K. N. – I have spent a lot of time studying the work of Robert Bouchet, Daniel Friederich and Arcángel Fernández. In the 1980s I experimented



Guitar inspired by Antonio de Torres.



His rosettes may vary, but always feature the same palette of colours.



The first guitar that he made under Antonio Marín is still kept in the workshop.

From
Nejime's tiny
workshop
come guitars
of great
beauty.



with all manner of different bracings, dimensions and construction techniques. In Japan, we have a tradition of building instruments in the same way that violins are built, but my time spent with Marín and the other luthiers made me switch to the Spanish method.

Which type of guitar do you make?

K. N. – Because of my admiration for the guitars of the great Spanish masters, my starting point is a template by Santos Hernández, with a fan of seven closed struts, fairly conventional and, naturally, without any additional reinforcement under the bridge. I have moved the two end-struts, however, placing them a little closer to the centre. I like the sound of the Spanish guitars from the

“My starting point is a template by Santos Hernández, with a fan of seven closed struts, fairly conventional.”



"I love the guitars of the great Spanish masters."

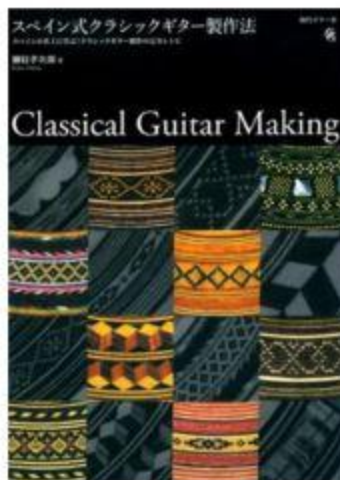
20s and 30s, but I try to deliver more volume and projection.

Which wood do you prefer to work with?

K. N. – For me, it is the quality of the wood that is essential; the variety itself is secondary. I tailor my construction to the wood in hand. Each wood has its own characteristics; each piece its own personality. I can enjoy working just as much with spruce as with red cedar for my tops; I have even tried American spruces: Sitka, Engelmann and Adirondack.

How does one recognise one of your guitars?

K. N. – Luthiers in Japan do not really aim to create a signature head design; we tend to change them periodically. On the other hand, my rosettes are always – or nearly always – the same; the patterns may sometimes vary, but not the colours or the feeling. I guess that it is more my bracing that characterises my guitars...



Nejime's book on guitar making: a vital guide for a whole generation of Japanese luthiers.



His concert model, with soundboard of Sitka, an American spruce.

Kaoru Ono

He was introduced to Spanish lutherie by Alberto Nejime and completed his training with José Luis Romanillos.

He is a perfectionist in his work and is passionate about Japanese woodworking tools.

尾野薫





The “soleras” attest to his research efforts.

When did you start making guitars and why?

Kaoru Ono – I started playing the guitar when I was in secondary school and I built my first guitar in my practical wood technology classes at university. I subsequently made a few more on my own but it wasn't long before I wanted to find proper training, and in 1980, I learned how to craft guitars using the traditional Spanish method with Alberto Nejime.

Which other luthiers have influenced you?

K. O. – In 2001, I headed to Spain to take a course by José Luis Romanillos, in Sigüenza. I was also lucky enough to receive tips from Arcángel Fernández when he came to Japan. Since I repair guitars for the Aura Guitar Shop, I often have the chance to examine the guitars



A guitar inspired by Hauser, albeit with a uniquely personal headstock design.



The influence of Romanillos is ever-present in Kaoru Ono's work.



An exquisite blend of rosewood and maple.



Flawless finishing, right down to the bridge.

“I love the excellent tools that we have in Japan. I have learned a great deal about the tools with Noboru Tsuchida.”

made by the master luthiers: Santos, Esteso, Hauser, Torres...

Do you have any favourite woods?

K. O. – For my tops, I like spruce and I have just received a shipment of beautiful European spruce boards, sent over from Germany by my fellow luthier, Gerhard Oldiges. I like boards with bear claws, quite stiff, even if it makes planing a little harder and more treacherous.

For the backs and sides I mostly use Indian and Brazilian rosewoods; maple, too, but to a lesser extent.

What sound qualities are you after?

K. O. – To me, the most important thing is to achieve a clear separation of the voices; I like to hear each and every note in a chord. Sustain and volume also have their place, but they are not my priorities. Moreover, I like the pitch of my guitars' air resonance to be G or G-sharp; that, I think, is the best pitch for avoiding wolf notes.

I believe that you are very fond of carpentry tools...

K. O. – Yes, I love the excellent tools that we have here in Japan. I have learned a great deal about the different tools with Noboru Tsuchida, who runs a boutique here in Tokyo, specialised



A PASSION FOR TOOLS

Noboru Tsuchida owns a store in Tokyo, very well-known among luthiers, which sells professional quality tools. For any aficionados of Japanese tools who are planning a trip to Japan, we can thoroughly recommend a visit.

in woodwork (see insert). I adjust some of them myself: I add, for example, strips of bone and ebony opposite the blades on my planes so as to achieve more accurate cutting depth.

How many models do you make?

K. O. – At least five models: Torres, Hauser, Bouchet, Romanillos and my own model. Currently, I am focusing a lot on the work of Hauser I, especially his guitars from the 1930s. My own model has the dimensions of a Hauser, with quite a thick top, around 2.6 mm.

All my guitars are French polished and all up, I produce ten to twelve instruments each year.



Ono tweaks his planes by adding a strip of bone and ebony in front of the iron.



Masahiro Tanabe

Masahiro Tanabe has a researcher's instinct and his curiosity has led him right back to the birth of the guitar. Today, Antonio de Torres is the guiding light for his work.

田邊

雅啓





It is his curiosity that leads him to vary the backs of his guitars.



His marvellous chisel collection.



Some of his planes feature twin blades.

When and how did you become interested in lutherie?

Masahiro Tanabe – I have always enjoyed working with wood and loved music since childhood. So after graduating from university, I began working at Ishii String Instruments. One advantage of my job in Mr Sakae Ishii's workshop was that we each had to build our instruments from start to finish, rather than work on only one part, like in other workshops. Another advantage was that we also made Romantic guitars, lutes and other string instruments. We churned out instruments like a little factory; I would make up to four classical guitars a month.

And your aim was to make quality guitars...

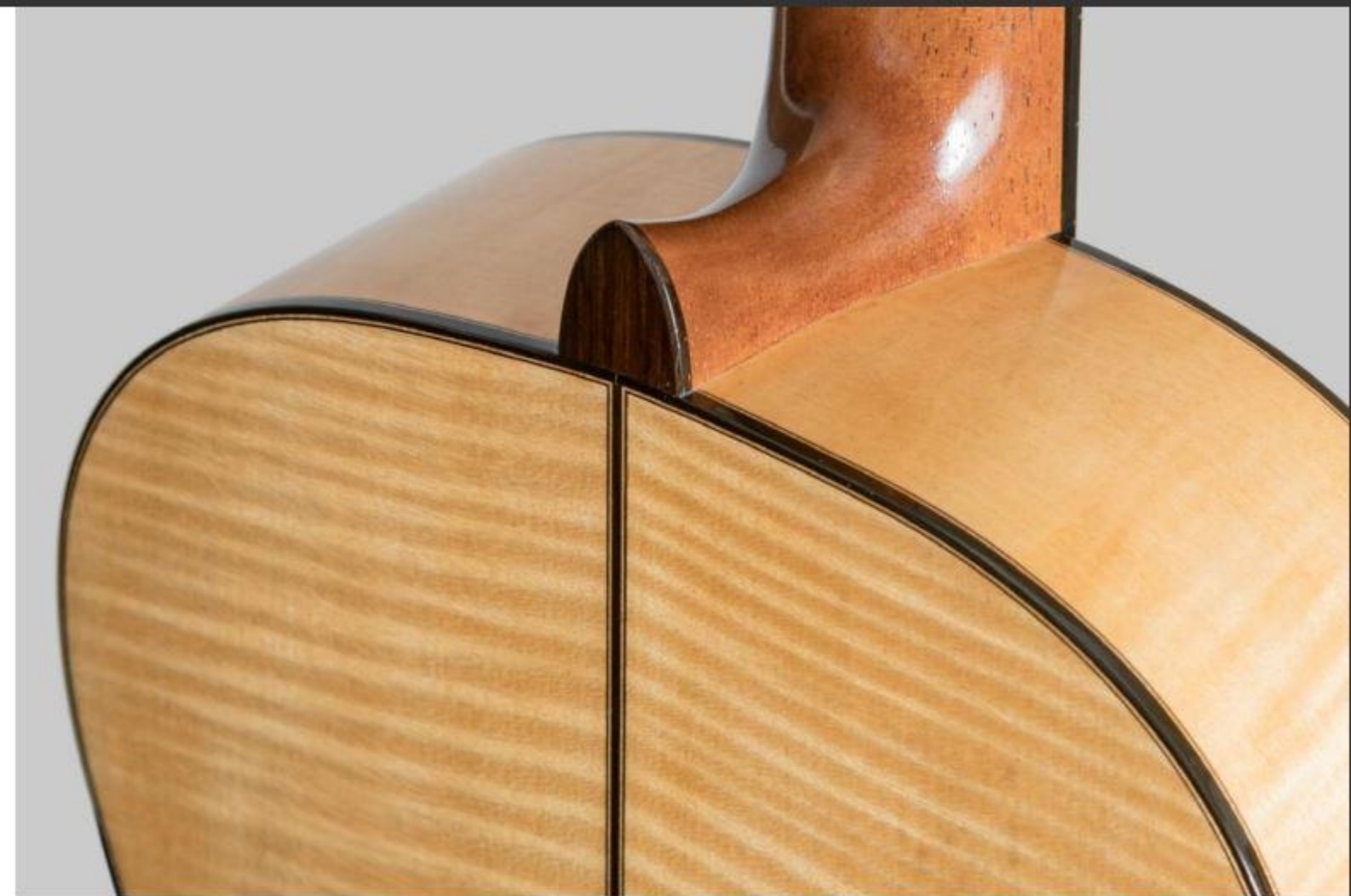
M. T. – Yes, and it was at that time that I met Kaoru Ono, who changed my vision of the guitar, talking not only about its outward appearance, but rather about the quest for that beautiful sound and the importance of the guitar's each and every component. In 2001, Kiyohisa Motoyama told me about the training courses taught by José Luis Romanillos in Sigüenza (Spain). I attended a course at the same time as Kaoru Ono, Jun Nakano and Sa-

A clever way to immobilise parts: using mattress springs.





Spruce top,
rosewood
laminate head
and Fustero
tuning machines.



A maple version of Segovia's Manuel Ramirez.

toru Sakuma. It was incredible, to be working and discussing nothing but guitars morning, noon and night! I went back to Japan feeling so overwhelmed that I spent the next two years researching and honing my craft before finally feeling satisfied with one of my guitars and opening my own studio. In the meantime, I had started doing repairs for the Aura Guitar Shop, which afforded me the chance to study the work of the master luthiers.

Have there been other influences?

M. T. – Yes, in 2004, I went back to Spain and visited the workshops of Antonio Marín (Granada), Manuel Reyes (Córdoba) and Arcángel Fernández

(Madrid). But the influence also came from the culture, the advice of the luthiers, their working methods, the physical contact with superb guitars, the way that they vibrate, everything influenced my subsequent work.

With which woods do you like to work?

M. T. – For the soundboards, I prefer spruce; remember that I was trained by Romanillos! For the back and ribs, Brazilian rosewood is all very fine, but I do think that it is more important to ensure

harmony between the top and the body. If the top is well-tuned with the body, Indian rosewood, maple or cypress can also yield very good results.





Knowing how to play certainly facilitates his research.

And what are your guitars like today?

M. T. – I started out by copying the Romanillos guitar, but later I figured that he had in turn taken his inspiration from Hauser guitars, and so I made a replica of one. Then I started thinking that Hauser had in turn been inspired by a Manuel Ramírez made by Santos Hernández, and I made another one just like it. And, ultimately, I found myself going right back to Torres because he had been the inspiration for Manuel. It was like travelling back in time...

While I understand how all of the other luthiers contributed to the instrument's development, I still find that the Torres sound is the most beautiful. It may not be the most balanced guitar, nor the most powerful, but the sound is very rich. He is the luthier that I am focusing on, and what I am trying to do is create the guitar that I think Torres would be making if he were alive today.

His replica of a Torres model: magnificent in its every detail.



Fushimi Inari,
Kyoto, the
shrine of a
thousand
vermillion
torii gates,
protecting
rice and
agriculture.



Aura Guitar Shop

The Aura Guitar Shop, in Tokyo, is more than just a high-end classical guitar store. Its owner, Kiyohisa Motoyama, has transformed this boutique into an incubator for young luthiers and a hotspot where guitarists and collectors meet.



Some of the great names in Spanish and international lutherie are lined up in the glass-fronted display cases.

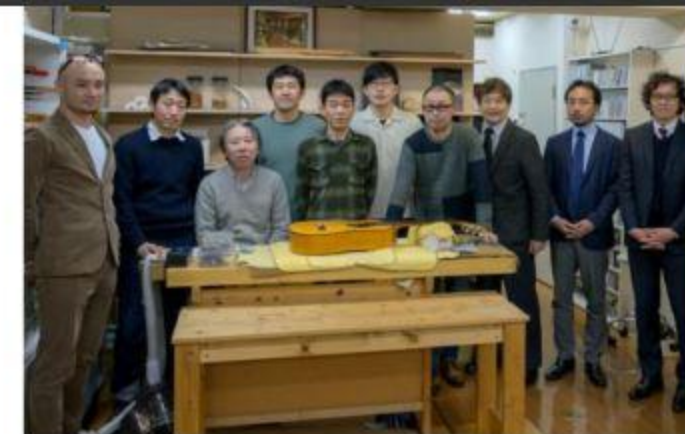
In one of the rooms, rare gems sit regally behind glass: guitars crafted by the great names of Spanish and international lutherie, including Domingo Esteso, Robert Bouchet, Hermann Hauser...

In another room, a customer is playing the instrument of his dreams while in the workshop, a luthier is repairing a guitar. So unusual, and so inviting.

As a young man, Kiyohisa Motoyama, the director and founder of Aura, completed his training as a guitarist at the Royal Conservatory of Music, in Madrid (hence his fluency in Spanish); he made enduring friendships with Spanish and European luthiers and ended up opening his shop in Tokyo.

For years now, he has been encouraging Japanese guitar makers to take training courses in Spain and study the guitars of the master luthiers that he sells in his boutique. With his inclusive disposition, he facilitated exceptional solidarity and comradeship among luthiers. Some come to repair guitars in Aura's workspace and everyone shares information, experience and knowledge with a spirit of openness. Such a rare phenomenon in the guitar world is to be welcomed.

What everyone seems to bear in mind are the words of advice given to Masahiro Tanabe by Arcángel Fernández: "The most important thing when building guitars is to do it with your heart, nothing else. I would add one more thing: take your time and work with care. There are no hidden secrets."



The Aura team and its luthiers: Masahiro Tanabe, Jun Nakano, Kaoru Ono, Daisuke Kuriyama, Yuichi Shimizu, Marín Nejime, Satoru Sakuma, Kiyohisa Motoyama, Hiroya Ishikawa and Shiro Yoshida.



Sana Motoyama writing the names of the luthiers.

Introduction to young luthiers

Alongside the eminent luthiers that we have met in the previous pages, a new generation is emerging: Daisuke Kuriyama, Marín Nejime, Yuichi Shimizu, but also Jun Nakano and Satoru Sakuma whose workshops we did not have time to visit. They are young, curious and passionate about their craft. Endowed with the time-honoured Japanese legacy of woodwork, they have all been to Spain to deepen their knowledge of the classical guitar (each has given pride of place to a photo of Antonio Marín or José Luis Romanillos in the workshop!).

Ed. – Our deepest thanks go to Kiyohisa Motoyama. Without his vast knowledge of lutherie, his story and his connections, without his assistance in arranging our visits to the luthiers, his translations, this edition of Orfeo would not have been possible.

Daisuke Kuriyama

He is a fan of Santos Hernández and Domingo Esteso, with their light, highly responsive guitars. He makes eight guitars a year and already has about sixty under his belt as an independent luthier.

How did you get into guitar making?

Daisuke Kuriyama – I discovered the guitar with some friends at university and in 2003 I took up a post working for a guitar merchant in Tokyo. Later, I became fascinated with the construction of guitars when reading Alberto Nejime's book, and in 2010, I started learning under Kaoru Ono.

Which luthiers interest you the most?

D. K. – I especially like Kaoru Ono's work, as I apprenticed with him. Apart from that, it is above all the Spanish luthiers of the thirties that I like: Santos, and Esteso, for example.

At the moment, I make guitars inspired by the great Spanish masters, trying to understand their construction and sound. I don't feel quite ready yet to make my own model.

But these guitars are never 100% replicas; I always include my own personal touches, which help me to see how the instrument works as a whole.

What are your preferred woods?

D. K. – I like cypress, even though I know that it is more difficult to sell. Of course, I also like rosewood and maple.

We are currently making a guitar using a new, ecological and sustainable material: kebony. It is chemically hardened maple and the result is similar to rosewood. This is a joint project among Kaoru Ono, Masahiro Tanabe, Marín Nejime, Yuichi Shimizu and myself. Each of us is making a different component (top, neck, ribs or whatever); it is such an enriching experience, real team work.





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Marín Nejime

Born in 1986, he is the son of Kojiro "Alberto" Nejime. He was a finalist in the 2017 International Guitar Making Competition organised in Granada.



We can only guess that you learned lutherie with your father...?

Marín Nejime – Yes, with my father, and my father in turn learned under Antonio Marín. Like them, I build my guitars using the Spanish method.

What inspired you to make a Friederich replica?

M. N. – During my stay in Granada with Marín in 2012, Antonio encouraged me to experiment and undertake research. Since I had already made a guitar inspired by Robert Bouchet, I thought to myself that the next logical step was Daniel Friederich, who is considered Bouchet's successor.

Which guitar are you working on currently?

M. N. – I am trying out different bracings. I am looking for a sound that is more Spanish than that of Bouchet or Friederich. I took my father's bracing as a starting point and I have made variations thereupon. Obviously, I am greatly influenced by the sound of guitars from Granada, but I would like to update it a little. My research is ongoing...



Yuichi Shimizu

He came to lutherie
via the acoustic guitar.
For the last four years,
he has focussed exclusively
on making classical guitars.



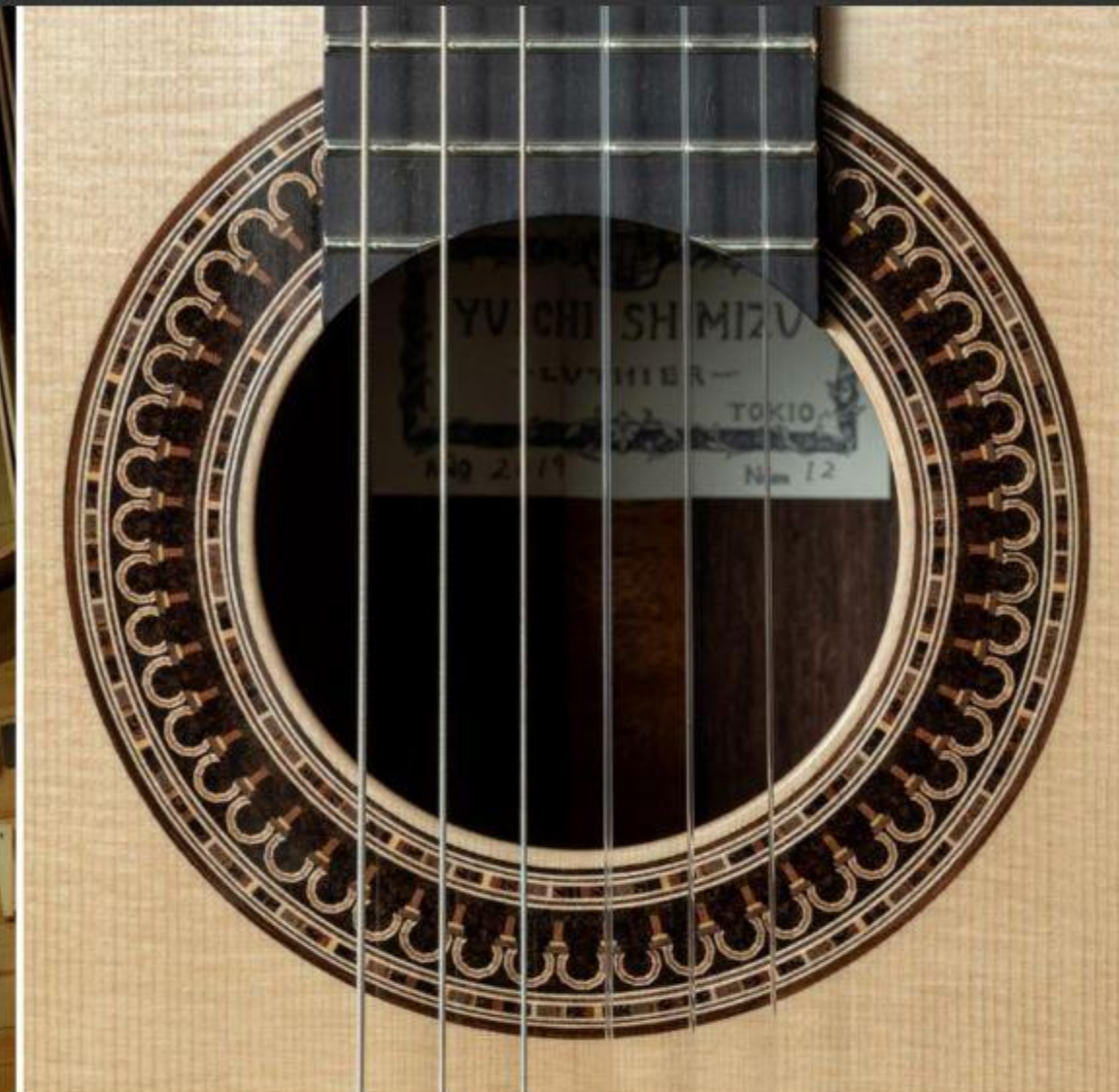
How did you come to lutherie?

Yuichi Shimizu – I have always loved music and one day, on a course given by a local luthier, I discovered how guitars were built. After that, I was mostly interested in acoustic guitars, and I signed up to a school of lutherie where I learned how to make acoustic and electric guitars. Once I had finished my training, I took up employment under Kohno, where I worked for thirteen years. With Kohno, the classical guitar began to appeal to me more and more, but my job was very specialized and I only made four guitars start to finish. So one day, I went to have a word with Kaoru Ono...

And in him, you found yourself a mentor...

Y. S. – Yes, and with him, lutherie became a passion. Ono makes all of his students recreate the great guitars of yesteryear so as to better understand them. I made a Romanillos, a Hauser and I am planning to make a Torres. Right now, it's the clear, balanced sound of the Hauser that I like best.

I have been an independent luthier for four years now and, in parallel with guitar repairs, I've already made a dozen.



The
Arashiyama
forest, Kyoto,
where the
bamboo
reaches over
ten metres in
height.



Takenaka Carpentry Tools Museum



Dozens of ancient tools attest to the history of carpentry in Japan.



The foyer ceiling is made entirely out of natural wood using traditional woodworking techniques.

The Takenaka museum was established in 1984 with a view to collecting, conserving and showcasing Japan's traditional carpentry tools as part of its cultural heritage for future generations.

The museum is situated in a garden not far from Kobe's Shinkansen train station.



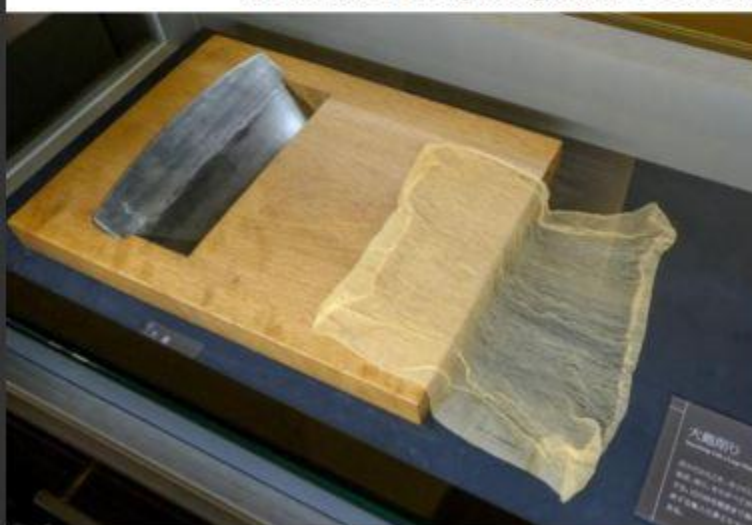
In parallel to the development of wooden constructions, the array of tools used by Japanese carpenters also grew: planes, hammer, saws and chisels of all shapes and sizes, tailored to each artisan's hand and strokes. Up until the nineteenth century, Japanese architecture was almost exclusively based on wood, which meant that carpenters developed an intimate knowledge of the material and how to use it, particularly regarding joinery systems. Alongside the forging of Japan's famous "ka-



The incredible wealth of their assembly techniques.



A chisel for every imaginable occasion.



A plane for rafters, with its 30 cm iron.



A model showing the complex joinery system used in temples.

tana" (sabres that have come to symbolise the Samurai) Japanese smiths also accumulated exceptionally sophisticated expertise when it came to tool-making. Through their knowledge of shapes, alloys and polishing, they were able to craft extremely effective tools and achieve a blend of beauty and functionality. Traditionally, the most elegant, the most impeccable hand-forged tools proudly would bear the engraved signature of their creator.

The Takenaka museum is in Kobe, near Osaka, housed in a magnificent building featuring noteworthy construction details: the ceiling of the main foyer, built like a boat; or the doors hand-shaped by adze.

The first level is dedicated to history, with a chronological display of tools starting from the iron age. Upstairs, we can admire the joinery techniques, in all their extraordinary diversity and complexity, while the third storey houses collections of tools, classified by family. Here we have selected for you five essential guitar making tools.

The saw (nokogiri)

Saws, like most other Japanese tools, are designed to cut on the pull-stroke, unlike the vast majority of saws elsewhere in the world, which also cut on the push-stroke. This means that the blades can be thinner and more efficient, and the width of the resultant cut is very narrow.

Another feature of Japanese saws is their huge variety; each model is designed for specific tasks. They fall into two major categories: those that rip (cutting along the wood's grain); and those that crosscut (cutting across the grain). There is also one saw, in use since the late 19th



An outstanding museum in terms of its scenography and modern ambience.





Two ancient grooving planes from the Takenaka collection.

century, with teeth on both sides of the blade, which can perform both functions. The forward edge of each tooth is perpendicular to the blade while the rear edge is tapered, and alternating left and right, a feature which prevents the blade from jamming in the groove while sawing. Saw teeth come in various profiles, whetted in accordance with how the saw is to be used.

The plane (kanna)

The rectangular shape of the planes that can be seen in Japan today was introduced around the fifteenth century.

Japanese planes are unique in that they are designed to be operated by pulling toward the user, rather than by the pushing motion that is predominant elsewhere.

Planes, too, come in a wide range of shapes and styles, suited to the different stages in finishing a surface.

The plane comprises chiefly a metal blade and a wooden body, typically oak because of its hardness. Carpenters sometimes fashion the body themselves, but this is becoming increasingly rare; most are now produced industrially.

Some planes sport a second blade, flush with the first, which serves as a control iron, avoiding any irregularities caused by tear out.

The chisel (nomi)

Comprising a metal blade which continues as a stem up inside the wooden handle. The blade is forged in a similar fashion to that of a plane: a core of hard steel enveloped in a softer, less brittle steel. Some chisel blades are hollowed out, which facilitates sharpening.

There are several types of woodworking chisels, but the two main categories are bench chisels and paring chisels. Bench chisels, designed to



An antique plane bearing the signature of the blacksmith who forged it.



Hammer head, decorated and signed by Korehide Chiyozuru.



Bench chisels, with their protective rings on the handle.

be used with a hammer, have a sturdy structure and a metal hoop around the top of the handle. Paring chisels are used, as the name suggests, for smoothing surfaces that are too small for a plane. Since they are never malleted – designed instead to be pushed forward by the hand – they feature a longer handle.

As is the case with planes, it is the quality of a chisel's forged blade that makes all the difference and this has led to specialisation among many master smiths.

The hammer (genno)

The Japanese hammer is used mainly for driving chisels or nails. The different varieties are recognisable by the shape of the head: the ryoguchi-genno features two identical striking surfaces, while the funate-genno and kataguchi-genno both have one side tapered for precision work. On some hammers, the faces are shaped differently: one striking surface is flat and the other

slightly domed in the centre. The flat face is for striking chisels and nails, while the convex face is used for the light finishing taps when driving in a nail so as not to dent the surrounding wood. Hammer sizes are usually stated in terms of their weight and the handles are generally made of oak.

The knife (kogatana)

The "kogatana" (small "katana") is a Japanese utility knife, used principally for sculpting wood. It has a core of very hard – but brittle – carbon steel, covered by a layer of softer, less damage-prone steel.

Generally, only one side of the blade on these woodworking knives is sharpened, affording very fine, accurate cutting. The back is slightly hollowed in order to facilitate honing. Having a single-bevel blade makes it easier to cut along a straight edge, or make cuts during veneer work.



Woodworking knife used on a daily basis by Yuichi Shimizu.



Kaoru Ono's perfectly balanced hammers, with their shaped handles tailored to offset the weight of the head.



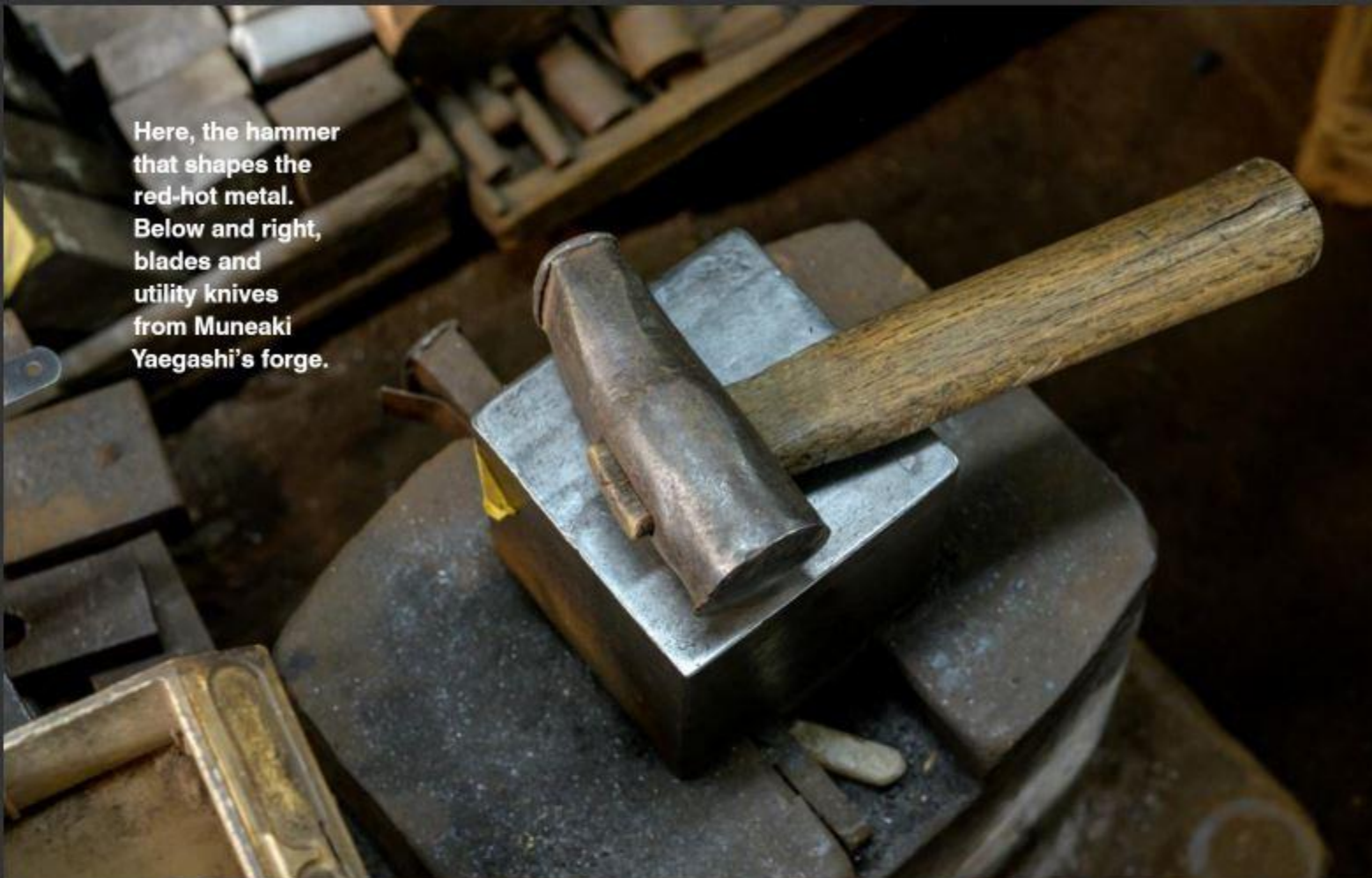
Sitting atop the punch cases, a superb knife from the forge of Muneaki Yaegashi.



A smith hard at work in the forge (Muneaki Yaegashi, in Tokyo). Top right, a punch for stamping the completed tools. The earthen floor, antique stove complete with kettle, old drive belts... everything in this workshop leads to a feeling of timelessness.



Here, the hammer
that shapes the
red-hot metal.
Below and right,
blades and
utility knives
from Muneaki
Yaegashi's forge.





Kyoto's
Kinkaku-ji Temple,
or Golden Pavillion,
whose two upper
levels are covered
in gold leaf. Set
beside a pond
in breathtaking
garden
surroundings,
it is listed as a
UNESCO World
Heritage site.

Paris, April 2020

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